

Testimony of Angela E. Ryan
Michigan Senate Economic Development Committee
October 12, 2011

Good afternoon. I'd like to thank Senator Kowall and the members of the Senate Economic Development Committee for the opportunity to address the committee today. My name is Angela Ryan, and I am the former Port Director for U. S. Customs and Border Protection in Detroit. I am here today to provide you with my perspective for supporting the New International Trade Crossing.

I worked for the U. S. Customs Service, then U. S. Customs and Border Protection, for 33 years before retiring in October 2004. I was the Port Director in Detroit from May 2000 until my retirement. In that position, I managed all Customs employees assigned to the Ambassador Bridge, the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel, and Detroit Metropolitan Airport, as well as a staff in the Patrick V. McNamara Building. Shortly before the creation of the Department of Homeland Security in March 2003, the airport became a separate port. With the creation of U. S. Customs and Border Protection under Homeland Security, I became the manager for the former Customs, Immigration, and Agriculture employees assigned to the bridge and the tunnel.

Before September 11, 2001, I had occasional contact with the staff of the Detroit International Bridge Company. Starting on September 11, our contact was much more frequent. Many of the conversations were initiated by the bridge company due to backups at the bridge. In the days immediately after September 11, our shortages in staff and equipment were apparent. Customs officers were brought to Detroit from other ports around the country, but most of them had no experience working at a land border crossing. We had assistance from other organizations, including the Michigan National Guard and the Wayne County Sheriff's office. We were dealing with an issue of unparalleled severity for this country, and each day was a new learning experience. The focus of the federal agencies was to ensure that no additional terrorist attacks would occur. The focus of the bridge company was to keep the traffic moving.

We were also limited by the number of Customs booths available to clear the trucks. The General Services Administration, or GSA, is the landlord for all federal agencies. The land where the Fort Street Cargo Facility currently sits is a patchwork quilt of property owned by the bridge company and the federal government. So, the bridge company was, and is, involved in many discussions regarding any changes to the facility. GSA was in the process of getting additional booths built when the September 11 attacks occurred, but the progress was slow. Somehow, the bridge company took over the project, and got the booths built, which provided some relief for the traffic. We still had limited personnel, however, so we weren't always able to staff all of the booths.

As our staffing increased, the bridge company decided to build four additional booths, without discussing it with GSA or Customs personnel. We did not have enough officers to staff these additional booths or the necessary equipment for them, so they sat unused for some time. After September 11, whenever the bridge company's calls to me and my immediate supervisor did not result in additional booths being opened, they would call Customs management in Washington. Sometimes they even called the White House. The result was that people 500 miles away were

telling us how to run our day-to-day operation. We could have been running an enforcement operation, which we could not disclose to bridge company personnel, yet we were required to act upon the bridge company's demands. Calls to Washington also resulted in the daily use of the four newly-built booths, regardless of the costs to have sufficient personnel on duty to staff those booths.

Truck traffic on the Ambassador Bridge peaked in the mid-2000s. While I was Port Director, we frequently processed 6,000-6,500 trucks on a weekday. Soon after I retired, I learned that the number had risen to 7,000 trucks a day. Although the volume is down now, there are still about 5,500 trucks processed on a weekday.

Vehicle traffic at its peak was about 12,000 cars a day. That's now down to 6,000-8,000 cars a day. There are many reasons for these drops. Certainly the economy is a big factor. The requirement for a passport to cross the border has no doubt dampened the interest of many travelers from making that trip, particularly if it's just to go for a meal or shopping. The strength of the Canadian dollar has most likely contributed to the reduction in vehicular traffic. The change to a completely non-smoking casino in Windsor has also had a negative impact on traffic volume.

With these drops in traffic, many people ask why we need another bridge. I can cite a number of reasons. First, the Ambassador Bridge is over 80 years old. When it was built, no one could have envisioned the volume of traffic that now uses the bridge. 25% of the trade between Canada and the United States crosses that bridge. To put that in other terms, if Michigan and Ontario were independent countries, they would be the largest trading partners in the world. If something were to happen to the bridge, the result would be catastrophic for both of our economies.

Second, the facility is at maximum space capacity. The bridge company has added booths for vehicle clearance since I retired. I do not think there is any more room for expansion. The office space at the bridge plaza is far too small for the staff, and it is not conducive to reconfiguring to make it more usable. At the same time, the cargo facility has expanded almost to the street that separates the facility from St. Ann's Church. That church is the oldest structure in the city of Detroit. I think it is pretty unlikely that there is potential for any expansion for cargo clearance.

Building a new bridge with potential for future expansion is the ideal situation. There is little room for expansion at the Ambassador Bridge. Building a second bridge next to the existing one would not provide space to expand when the need arises.

Third, money is available now. The offer from the Canadian Government is not likely to come again. The U. S. Government is not going to be able to fund such a project in the near future, so the time is right to build.

Fourth, the new bridge would not be privately owned. To my knowledge, there is only one other privately owned international bridge in the United States, and it is at a little-used border crossing. The crossing between Windsor and Detroit is too critical to the two nations not to have its

control in government hands. As I learned first hand, daily operations are much more complicated when a private company dictates how a federal agency does its job.

The bridge company has expressed concerns that they will lose business if the second bridge is built. In the short term, that is a possibility. However, as no one in 1929 could envision the traffic we have today, we cannot possibly envision the economic growth that is likely to occur in both the U. S. and Canada in coming years. If we wait until we need a second bridge, it will be too late to start building it. Projections are that it will take 7-10 years to build NITC. By that time, there may well be enough traffic to keep both bridges profitable.

Today, there are three major bridges in Buffalo, New York and they process about 50% of the traffic that crosses into Detroit. It is conceivable that if there were a second bridge here, some trucks that currently cross at other ports would come to Detroit. Certainly as the economy improves, traffic will increase.

For those of you familiar with I-696 in the Detroit area, you may recall all the discussions that occurred before that road was built. Once it was completed, it did not get that much use. I can remember driving that road soon after it was opened, and I could count the number of cars around me. Today, there are frequent backups due to the heavy traffic volume on I-696. Because the road was built, additional housing and shopping developments were built to take advantage of the new road. Nonetheless, I-96 and I-94 still have high traffic volumes, certainly as much as they had before I-696 was built.

I see the same thing happening with a second bridge. Our nation's business philosophy is that competition is good. A new bridge needs to last 100 years. Smart planning means building a bridge that meets the demands of the future. There need to be plazas large enough to handle current and future traffic demands. Adding a bridge should not be seen as a threat to the Ambassador Bridge. Rather it should be viewed as one more reason that cars and trucks will travel between the U. S. and Canada by crossing through Windsor and Detroit.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak here today. I will now answer any questions that you may have.